

Message Text

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ACTION A-01

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RSC-01 /019 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 783

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

CINCPAC

USSAG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 3200

LIMDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OREP, PINT, MOPS, CB (SENATOR EDWARD W. BROOKE)

SUBJ: CODEL BROOKE: CONVERSATION WITH MARSHAL LON NOL
APRIL 4, 1973

VIENTIANE PLEASE PASS SENATOR BROOKE

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. SENATOR BROOKE MET WITH PRESIDENT LON NOL FOR NINETY MINUTES AND SUBSEQUENTLY LUNCED WITH HIM AT CHAMCAR MON ON APRIL 4. THE MARSHAL HAD A LARGE BUT AS USUAL SILENT RETINUE WITH HIM, INCLUDING PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE LT. GEN. SAUKAM KHOY, PRIME MINISTER HANG THUN HAK, MINISTER OF STATE MAU SAY, MINISTER OF DEFENSE THAPPANA NGINN, ACTING MINISTER OF FINANCE KEO MONGKRY, AND DY BELLONG, ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT. I ACCOMPANIED SENATOR BROOKE AND WE WERE JOINED AT LUNCH BY MR. HAND AND MR. ROSSITER, HIS STAFF ASSISTANTS, AND POL- MIL COUNSELOR GARDNER.

2. THE CONVERSATION, WHILE FRIENDLY, WAS NOTABLE FOR SENATOR BROOKE'S CANDID AND FORCEFUL DESCRIPTION OF THE OPPOSITION IN THE UNITED STATES TO CONTINUING US
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INVOLVEMENT IN INDO- CHINESE HOSTILITIES AND FOR HIS PERSONAL OBJECTION TO B-52 STRIKES IN CAMBODIA. END

SUMMARY.

3. AFTER AN EXCHANGE OF PLEASANTRIE WITH THE MARSHAL, SENATOR BROOKE OUTLINED HIS INTEREST IN POSTWAR RECONSTRUCTION IN THE FORMER STATES OF INDO- CHINA. WITH RESPECT TO THE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA, HE REMARKED THAT RECONSTRUCTION COULD HARDLY BEGIN WHILE DESTRUCTION IS STILL TAKING PLACE, BUT HE EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT HUMANITARIAN AID PROGRAMS CAN BE ACCELERATED EVEN WHILE HOSTILITIES CONTINUE. LATER IN THE CONVERSATION HE MENTIONED HIS VISIT APRIL 3 TO THE PO MEANCHEY REFUGEE CENTER NORTHWEST OF PHNOM PENH, WHICH IMPRESSED HIM FAVORABLY, BUT CAUTIONED THAT THE KHMER SHOULD CAREFULLY COORDINATE THE HUMANITARIAN AID WHICH IS NOW FLOWING FROM VARIOUS EXTERNAL SOURCES, BOTH GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE.

4. THE SENATOR THEN ASKED THE MARSHAL IF HE MIGHT SPEAK TO HIM FRANKLY ABOUT THE AMBIVALENT ATTITUDES IN THE UNITED STATES TOWARD THE KHMER REPUBLIC. HE NOTED THAT HE IS NOT A MEMBER OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THEREFORE COULD NOT SPEAK FOR IT, AND THAT ALTHOUGH A SENATOR HE PREFERRED TO SPEAK PERSONALLY RATHER THAN AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LEGISLATURE. HE STATED THAT CAMBODIAIS GENERALLY REGARDED WITH SYMPATHY IN THE UNITED STATES BUT THAT PROGRAMS WHICH SEEM TO IMPLY A DEEPENING ENGAGEMENT OR A PROLONGATION OF US INVOLVEMENT IN HOSTILITIES IN FORMER INDO- CHINA ARE BASICALLY UNPOPULAR. HE DESCRIBED MANY AMERICANS AS FATIGUED AND DEPRESSED BY THE LONG WAR IN VIETNAM AND AS PSYCHOLOGICALLY DESIROUS OF SOME RETRENCHMENT FROM FOREIGN COMMITMENTS. HE SAW THIS ATTITUDE AS RE- ENFORCED BY A PREOCCUPATION WITH ECONOMIC AND DOMESTIC PROBLEMS WHICH NEED RESOLUTION AT HOME, INCLUDING INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND THE PLIGHT OF THE DOLLAR. HE SAID THAT SOME AMERICANS HAVE COME TO BELIEVE THAT THE WAR IN CAMBODIA IS ESSENTIALLY A CIVIL WAR; OTHERS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE DOMINO THEORY OF SUCCESSIVE CAPITULATION TO COMMUNISM IS VALID. SENATOR BROOKE EXPLAINED THAT IT IS AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND OF WIDESPREAD DISSENT FROM
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CONTINUING INVOLVEMENT IN THE INDO- CHINESE PENINSULA THAT PRESIDENT NIXON MUST FRAME HIS POLICIES.

5. FURTHER MILITARY INVOLVEMENT, THE SENATOR CONTINUED, IS REGARDED WITH PARTICULAR SUSPICION. HE CITED THE GROWING AGITATION AND DEBATES AT HOME OVER B-52 AND TACTICAL AIR OPERATIONS IN CAMBODIA, ESPECIALLY B-52 OPERATIONS WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS CONTROVERSIAL AND AS REGAREDED BY MANY AMERICANS AS INEFFECTIVE AGAINST NON-

INDUCTRIAL TARGETS AND AS INEVITABLY LESS ACCURATE THAN CLAIMED. THE SENATOR PREDICTED AN INTENSIFYING OPPOSITION IN THE NATION AND IN CONGRESS TO THE BOMBING IN CAMBODIA AND SAID HE FEARED IT WOULD HURT OTHER PROGRAMS OF INTEREST TO THE GKR. IF A POLITICAL SOLUTION AND A CEASE FIRE DO NOT COME SOON, A PROLONGED WAR IN CAMBODIA WOULD PRODUCE MUCH DEBATE AND LITTLE AID. THE SENATOR EXPRESSED THE PERSONAL VIEW THAT A MOVE TO TERMINATE B-52 STRIKES WOULD CREATE A MUCH MORE FAVORABLE CLIMATE FOR A CONTINUATION OF OTHER CAMBODIAN PROGRAMS. HE STRESSED THAT THE FIRST PRIORITY, AS HE SEES IT, IS TO STOP THE FIGHTING IN CAMBODIA.

6. LON NOL THANKED THE SENATOR FOR THIS PRESENTATION AND SAID THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO CLARIFY FOR THE SENATOR THE SITUATION AS VIEWED FROM PHNOM PENH. HE REVIEWED THE PHASES OF HANOI'S ENCROACHMENTS IN CAMBODIA, BEGINNING AS EARLY AS 1945 AND CONTINUING TO THE PRESENT. HE CITED THE DEPARTURE OF SEVERAL THOUSAND KHMER VIET MINH FOR TRAINING IN HANOI IN 1954 AND THEIR RETURN AS THE CADRE OF THE KHMER INSURGENCY IN 1970-1972. TURNING TO HIS COLLABORATORS, HE RECALLED THAT SAUKAM KHOY HAD FOUGHT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE IN 1953-1954, THAT HE HIMSELF HAD BEEN ENGAGED IN FIGHTING THEM AT PAILIN IN 1954, AND THAT THAPPANA NGINN HAD BEEN HIS CHIEF OF STAFF FOR SIMILAR OPERATIONS IN BATTAMBANG. THEY WERE ALL OLD HANDS IN COMBATTING THE IMPERIALISM OF HO CHIM MINH.

7. THE PRESENT WAR, LON NOL CONTINUED, HAD BEEN IMPOSED ON THE KHMER. THE FANK HAD HAD A WOEFULLY INADEQUATE FORCE OF 28,000 SOLDIERS WHEN ATTACKED BY THE NVA/ VC
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IN 1970. THEY WERE POORLY TRAINED AND EQUIPPED BUT HAD FOUGHT AS BEST THEY COULD. US LOGISTIC SUPPORT HAD BEEN CRITICAL TO THE WAR EFFORT, AND THE KHMER WOULD ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL FOR THIS TIMELY ASSISTANCE. EVEN NOW, HOWEVER, THE FANK IS UNDER STRENGTH FOR THE JOB IT MUST DO, PARTICULARLY WHEN ONE LOOKS AT THE 1.2 MILLION MEN UNDER ARMS IN SOUTH VIETNAM. THE MARSHAL SAID THAT HE HOPED THE USG WOULD CONTINUE ITS MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THE GKR. IT COULD NOT CONTINUE TO DEFEND ITSELF WITHOUT IT. IF THE GKR WERE TO COLLAPSE, SOUTH VIETNAM WOULD HAVE SERIOUS NEW PROBLEMS IN ASSURING ITS OWN SURVIVAL, AND OTHER NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES WOULD BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED. HE ALLUDED TO THE WAR AGAINST HITLER IN EUROPE AND IMPLIED THAT THE US SHOULD REMAIN DETERMINED TO DEFEND ITSELF AND ITS FRIENDS AGAINST THE COMPARABLE AGGRESSIVE DESIGNS OF NORTH VIETNAM IN SOUTHWAST ASIA.

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8. WITH RESPECT TO THE SEARCH FOR A CEASE- FIRE AND A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN CAMBODIA, LON NOL REMARKED THAT THE GKR HAD STOOD DOWN OFFENSIVE MILITARY ACTION IN RESPONSE TO THE CEASE- FIRE IN VIETNAM AND THAT IT FULLY SUPPORTS THE JANUARY 27 FOUR- POWER AGREEMENT ON VIETNAM. IT DESIRES ONLY THATHANOI RESPECT THAT AGREEMENT AND ITS PROVISION FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN TROOPS FROM CAMBODIA. INSTEAD OF DOING SO, IT HAS INTENSIFIED MILITARY OPERATIONS, INCLUDING ITS SUPPORT TO THE INSURGENCY. IN REPLY TO A QUESTION FROM THE SENATOR, HE FIXED THE INSURGENT STRENGTH AT ABOUT 38,000 MEN BUT COMMENTED THAT THE INSURGENCY HAS SERIOUS POLITICAL DIVISIONS. IN RECENT FIGHTING, HE ASSERTED THAT THE ASSAULT TROOPS TYPICALLY ARE KHMER, WITH NVA/ VC EMPLOYED AS FOLLOW- ON FORCES. (COMMENT. THIS PROBABLY EXAGGERATES THE ACTIVE NVA/ VC COMBAT ROLE, ALTHOUGH OVER THE PAST WEEK THERE HAS BEEN SOME EVIDENCE OF MORE DIRECT NVA/ VC INVOLVEMENT IN COMBAT OPERATIONS). THE MARSHAL STATED ALSO THAT THE KHMER INSURGENTS DO NOT APPEAR TO BE GROWING IN STRENGTH; THE REFUGEE FLOW IS IN THE DIRECTION OF GOVERNMENT- HELD PROVINCIAL CENTERS, AND THE NEED FOR NVA/ VC RE- ENFORCEMENTS SUGGESTS A NARROWING RECRUITMENT BASE.

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9. SENATOR BROOKE REFERRED TO ASSERTIONS BY SOME OBSERVERS THAT THE PRESENT POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE GKR CAN BE CHARACTERIZED AS QTE SIHANOUKISM WITHOUT SIHANOUK UNQTE AND ASKED THE MARSHAL TO COMMENT. THE MARSHAL SEEMED TO MISUNDERSTAND THE THRUST OF THIS QUESTION, ALTHOUGH HE STRESSED THAT THE REPUBLIC (AND HE SPECIFIED THE REPUBLIC RATHER THAN THE GOVERNMENT) IS FULLY SUPPORTED BY THE INTELLECTUALS AND THE BUDDHIST CLERGY. CLARIFYING THE QUESTION, SENATOR BROOKE ASKED IF THE FAVORITISM AND CORRUPTION ASSOCIATED WITH THE SIHANOUK ERA PERSISTS. THE MARSHAL RESPONDED WITH THE STATEMENT THAT HE BELIVES THE POPULATION SUPPORTS THE GOVERNMENT, CITING HIS EFFORTS TO HELP THE REFUGEES AND TO DEVELOP PROGRAMS OF MUTUAL HELP AND SUPPORT AMONG THE POPULATION (" ENTR' AIDE"). HE NEVERTHELESS ADMITTED THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS WHICH HE APTLY TERMED QTE VERY COMPLEX UNQTE.

10. DURING THE LUNCHEON THE SENATOR RAISED VARIOUS OTHER TOPICS ON WHICH THE MARSHAL COMMENTED AS FOLLOWS:

A. ON THE SUBJECT OF FORMER FINANCE MINISTER SON SANN, THE SENATOR' S HOST ON A JANUARY 1967 VISIT TO CAMBODIA, THE MARSHAL COMMENTED ON HIS AFFECTION FOR SON SANN' S DAUGHTER AND SON- IN- LAW, WHO RESIDE IN PHNOM PENH AND TO THE LATTER OF WHOM LON NOL IS HIMSELF RELATED. WITH RESPECT TO SON SANN, HOWEVER, HE COMMENTED ONLY THAT HE DOUBTED SON SANN WOULD RETURN FROM PARIS TO PHNOM PENH. THE MARSHAL MENTIONED NOTHING ABOUT A POLITICAL ROLE FOR HIM IN THE GKR.

B. ADVISED THAT SENATOR BROOKE WOULD CALL ON SIRIK MATAK LATER IN THE DAY(SE SEPTTEL), THE MARSHAL OBSERVED COOLY THAT THE SENATOR WOULD PROBABLY RECEIVE A PREJUDICED ACCOUNT FROM HIM OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS. (COMMENT. OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT LON NOL IS NOT YET IN A CONCILIATORY MOOD AND THAT IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO FORGET SIRIK MATAK' S FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE WITH HIM IN ANY WAY FOLLOWING THE T-28 BOMBING ATTEMPT ON CHAMCAR MON).

C. FOR WHATEVER REASON, PERHAPS THROUGH IGNORANCE
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OF THE STATUS OF THE INVESTIGATION, THE MARSHAL DENIED THAT MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY WILL BE BROUGHT TO TRIAL ALTHOUGH LATER ON APRIL 4 THE LOCAL RADIO ANNOUNCED THAT ELEVEN PERSONALITIES HAD BEEN PROVEN GUILTY AND WOULD BE CONVICTED (SEE SEPTTEL).

D. ASKED THE WHEREABOUTS OF HIS BROTHER, BGEN LON NON, THE MARSHAL STATED ONLY THAT HE WAS PROBABLY QTE AT

THE FRONT UNQTE. HE DID NOT MENTION THE FACT OF LON
NON' S RESIGNATION AS MINISTER ATTACHED OF THE INTERIOR,
ANNOUNCED BY AFP THE SAME DAY.

E. COMMENTING ON HIS HEALTH, THE MARSHAL SAID
THAT HE CONTINUES TO IMPROVE BUTTHAT QTE WHEN PEACE
RETURNS UNQTE HE HOPES TO LEAVE FOR MEDICAL
CONSULTATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES, PROBABLY IN NEW
YORK CITY WITH DR. IRVING COOPER.

11. TOASTS WERE EXCHANGED AT THE LUNCHEON. USING A
PREPARED TEXT, THE MARSHAL THANKED THE AMERICAN GOVERN-
MENT AND PEOPLE FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE, STRESSED THE
CONTINUING AGGRESSION FROM THE DRV, AND PROPOSED A
TOAST TO THE SENATOR' S HEALTH AND TO KHmero- AMERICAN
FRIENDSHIP. SENATOR BROOKE IN A GRACIOUS RESPONSE
THANKED THE MARSHAL FOR HIS HOSPITALITY AND FOR HIS
READINESS TO ENGAGE IN A FRANK AND FRIENDLY DISCUSSION
OF ISSUES OF MUTUAL INTEREST. HE PROPOSED A TOAST
TO THE HEALTH OF THE MARSHAL AND TO KHmero- AMERICAN
FRIENDSHIP.

12. COMMENT. THE ISSUE OF B-52 STRIKES IN CAMBODIA
(PARA 5 ABOVE) AROSE FREQUENTLY DURING THE SENATOR' S
VISIT, AND HE IS VERY CLEARLY TROUBLED BY THEM.
FOLLOWING A PRIVATE MEETING WITH THE LOCAL PRESS, HE TOLD
ME THAT SEVERAL JOURNALISTS HAD PASSED HIM REPORTS OF
CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN THE THOUSANDS AND OF NEW WAVES
OF REFUGEES FROM B52 OPERATIONS. (I EXPLAINED THAT
WEHAVE REPORTED AND COMMENTED ON THESE RUMORS TO
WASHINGTON). HE SAID THAT WHILE HE IS PREPARED TO
ACCEPT THESE REPORTS AS GREATLY EXAGGERATED, THERE IS
PROBABLY A RESIDUE OF TRUTH IN THEM. HE ASKED ME FOR
MY VIEWSON THE BOMBING. I REPLIED THAT IT IS
NECESSARY TO MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN TACTICAL AIR
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OPERATIONS AND B-52 STRIKES. USAF CLOSE AIR SUPPORT,
I NOTED, HAS MADE THE MARGIN OF DIFFERENCE IN ANY
NUMBER OF CRITICAL COMBAT SITUATIONS SINCE 1970
INVOLVING THE FANK; INDEED, WITHOUT IT, THE SURVIVAL
OF THE GKR WOULD HAVE BEEN IN QUESTION; IT WILL CONTINUE
TO BE A CRITICAL NEED UNTIL THERE IS A CEASE- FIRE.
B-52 STRIKES IN CAMBODIA, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE
STRATEGIC AND POLITICAL PURPOSES RELATED TO OUR OVER- A
INTEREST IN ENFORCING RESPECT FOR THE PARIS AGREEMENTS,
IN COUNTERING CLEAR- CUT VIOLATIONS OF IT BY THE DRV,
AND IN TERMINATING OFFENSIVE MILITARY ACTIONS THROUGHOUT
INDO- CHINA. WITHOUT RESPONDING AT ANY LENGTH, SENATOR
BROOKE AGAIN EXPRESSED VERY SERIOUS RESERVATIONS
CONCERNING THE B-52 STRIKES, WHICH I BELIEVE HE WOULD

LIKE TO SEE TERMINATED AT ONCE.

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